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Sent: Sun 6/10/2012 2:17:49 PM
Subject: [WQ News] Editorial: Sierra Club's about-face on natural gas in Colorado
Hotspot
conversion of Front Range coal-fired power plants
enthusiastic news release
recently wrote
preparing to launch a campaign
Editorial: Sierra Club's about-face on natural gas in Colorado - The Denver Post
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Editorial: Sierra Club's about-face on natural gas in Colorado

Despite the influential environmental group's sudden claims to the contrary, Colorado's energy future should include the clean-burning, abundant fuel.

Posted: 06/10/2012 01:00:00 AM MDT

By The Denver Post

Bryce Carter is an organizer for the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal Campaign in Colorado. The campaign is dedicated to transitioning America beyond dirty coal to clean energy like wind and solar. (Handout)

Just two years ago, the influential Sierra Club heaped praise on Colorado's Clean Air, Clean Jobs bill, which resulted in the conversion of Front Range coal-fired power plants to cleaner-burning, gas-fired operations.

The enthusiastic news release said the bill ought to "serve as a model for state legislatures."

That's what makes the Sierra Club's recent reversal in attitude toward natural gas all the more shocking.

The executive director of the influential environmental group recently wrote: "It's time to stop thinking of natural gas as a 'kinder, gentler' energy source."

To be blunt, no, it is not time.

We are dismayed that this group is repositioning itself as an anti-gas group, going as far as to proclaim that it will lobby to stop all new gas-fueled power plants.

It seems to us that as market conditions and technological advances have led to a boom in availability of cheap natural gas, the backtracking is born of fear — fear that this nation will come to rely on this "transitional fuel" as a long-term solution.

We happen to support continued subsidies and favorable government policies for renewables, but we cannot condone efforts to beat back all natural gas development.

First, the nation is ill-positioned to "leapfrog" over gas to move into wholesale reliance on renewable energy sources such as wind and solar. Those are viable options to fulfill a growing portion of energy demands, but they can't yet replace more reliable and often cheaper fossil fuels.

Second, burning natural gas releases about half the emissions of coal. That is clearly an improvement.

It's worth mentioning that between 2007 and 2010, the Sierra Club was so on board with natural gas that the organization took \$26 million in donations from the industry. But then the group reversed course and stopped taking the money.

Talk about a change of heart.

We suspect Coloradans will be hearing more about this issue before long. The Sierra Club is preparing to launch a campaign in Colorado that will target oil and gas development, according to a story in The Daily Sentinel in Grand Junction.

Joshua Ruschhaupt, director of the Sierra Club's Rocky Mountain chapter, told the Sentinel his organization's position is evolving as more is learned about problems associated with oil and gas development, including hydraulic fracturing.

The fears cited include groundwater pollution, which thus far has been all but non-existent from the fracking process itself — with one possible but highly disputed exception involving Pavillion, Wyo.

Another concern cited is air pollution, which should indeed be investigated further and may require additional policy solutions.

No energy source is without impact on the environment, though some clearly leave a bigger mark than others. The Sierra Club ought to be cheering the move toward cleaner natural gas, not condemning it because it's not a perfect solution.

Read more: Editorial: Sierra Club's about-face on natural gas in Colorado - The Denver Post
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